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PERSONAL HISTORY OF THE SECOND EMPIRE.

VI.—THE RENOVATION OF PARIS.

BY ALBERT D. VANDAM, AUTHOR OF "AN ENGLISHMAN IN PARIS," "MY PARIS NOTE-BOOK," ETC., ETC.

THERE appears to be a kind of poetical justice in the enjoyment Americans derive from their stay in Paris, for according to Napoleon III. himself the idea of transforming the capital *en bloc* and at one time was suggested to him by one of their countrymen. Truly, all the rulers before Napoleon III. had attempted to improve the capital both architecturally and hygienically, but those improvements were conceived and executed piecemeal, with the result that the city, in the pre-Haussmannic days, was like Mr. Wilfer in *Our Mutual Friend*; it had never worn a complete new suit of clothes. It is doubtful whether Paris had any such ambition, even the proposals in olden times to endow it with a new monument, a public square, or a street, having always met with most strenuous opposition on the plea of expense. The Parisians of Louis XIV.'s reign lampooned and criticised that monarch and his architect Mansart, as their successors lampooned and criticised Napoleon III. and his Prefect of the Seine, with this difference, that the subjects of "*le Roi-Soleil*" merely looked at the financial consequences of the proposed reforms, while the subjects of Louis Napoleon professed to be swayed in their opposition by loftier considerations than those of money only. When Mansart got frightened at the enormous outlay involved in his royal master's plans, and more or less "muddled" in his own accounts, Louis XIV. told him to "go on building; if you run short of funds, I will advance the money; the foreigner is sure to reimburse us."

Napoleon III.'s faith in the foreigner's willingness to pay liberally for the attractions provided for him was probably as

strong as that of the Bourbon, but he did not possess the private wealth of the latter to back his faith. Nevertheless, he virtually took a leaf from the *grand monarque's* book, but slightly transposed the text. "Go on building," he said to Haussmann; "the foreigner will reimburse the funds expended, but you must ask the Parisians to advance them." The two Bonapartes who ruled over France never disguised their admiration for the Bourbons; in several instances they revived the latter's miscarried or uncompleted legislation. Some one having remarked to Berryer: "*Louis Napoléon veut faire le lit de Henri IV.*," the eminent barrister replied: "*Au moins il ne lui manquera pas de paillasses.*"* Népomucène Lemer cier, the greatest dramatist of the First Empire and the sometime friend of Napoleon I., was more direct, though perhaps less scathing in his strictures on the Emperor's imitation of his predecessors, especially in matters of ceremonial. "*Vous vous amusez à refaire le lit des Bourbon; vous n'y coucherez pas,*" he told him to his face. Lemer cier's ire had been provoked by the golden bees on the Imperial mantle of the French Cæsar. He thought they were an imitation of the golden lilies of the *ancien régime*; while in fact, the golden lilies were an imitation of the golden bees on the mantles of the Frankish kings. But the bees had been forgotten for centuries, until a French *stadtholder* of the Southern Netherlands unearthed one of those cloaks at Tournay and presented it to Louis XIV. Napoleon I. found it in a cupboard in the Tuileries, and adopted the bees to oust the lilies.

"The voice of the people may be the voice of God," said Napoleon III. one day to my grand-uncle when alluding to the Parisians' criticisms on his transformation of their city; "the voice of the people may be the voice of God, but the ditties the people yell, rather than sing, are assuredly composed by Satan. When a ruler does nothing for them they shout about *un roi fainéant*; when a ruler attempts to do something for them, they misinterpret his motives, unless they invent some which are altogether foreign to his thoughts. At this present moment the opponents of my plans have adopted the cry that I am attempting to do too much at once, and that this attempt is prompted by my wish to hold all Paris in the palm of my hand by means of broad thoroughfares, in which large masses of troops can move freely and

* *Paillasse* means both a pallet and a clown, or mountebank.

cannon play effectually. Another section of society accuses me of wishing to reduce Paris to a mere city of pleasure, and make it the resort of all the profligates and idlers—titled and untitled, rich and poor, honest and dishonest—of the whole world. That, according to the last-named critics, is my method for stifling the nation's aspirations towards a higher standard of political liberty. If I had adopted Louis XIV.'s and my uncle's system of improving the capital bit by bit, the outcry and objections would have been just the same, though different reasons might have been alleged for them. You who have read the memoirs dealing with the reign of Louis XIV. and the First Empire know this as well as I do. But no shouting nor objections will prevent me from carrying out my plans wholesale. I made up my mind to that effect long ago. You asked me just now for a government situation for one of your *protégés* who is possessed of considerable talent, but if he has talent why does he not use it properly, instead of wasting it in a government office at the rate of 1,200 francs a year?" asked the Emperor, apparently going off at a tangent.

For a moment or so my uncle was at a loss for an answer, for he had asked himself the same question many a time in connection with the various candidates he had recommended to his Majesty.

"I suppose, sire," he said, at last, "that in spite of his talents, he is not clever." "Put it that way, if you like," remarked the Emperor; "I should say because he has got no imagination; for cleverness and imagination may in this instance be synonymous. From your description of the young fellow, I fancy he must be like a young fellow I met when I was in the United States—alike in every respect save in the possession of a strong imagination. Your young friend knows geometry, mathematics, surveying, and the rest; he has an inkling of architecture; and all that knowledge, which argues a considerable application on his part during his college days, he wishes to place at the disposal of the government in exchange for a stool and a salary of 1,200 francs at the *Ministère des Travaux Publics* (Board of Works). Well, the young American to whom I refer, and to whom I owe the idea of the wholesale transformation I am attempting, knew all these, though probably not so well as your young friend. But he did not apply to the United States Public Survey Office to help him

to get a crust of bread on a stipend which would have provoked the scorn of nine-tenths of the working men in America. He wanted to live, not to vegetate. He was bent on making a fortune ; and a twelve-month after my first meeting with him he was worth a couple of millions of dollars. He was poor and looked poor, so poor as to be frequently behindhand with the weekly payment at the boarding house in New York where we both stayed. But he never lost heart. One day he came in, an hour late for dinner, but with a big roll of paper under his arm. ‘I am very sorry to be late, but I have got hold of my fortune to-day,’ he said in the way of apology, pointing to the papers, which turned out to be the complete plans of a city for 40,000 inhabitants with its churches, its public squares, its monuments, etc., etc., including even an exchange. It looked like a fairy city, but the plans were nevertheless carefully worked out ; it was the city of the future, such as I intend to have in France, if I live long enough. The young fellow had, however, done more than merely to draw an attractive city on paper ; he had bought the site of it—of course conditionally ; entered into contracts with builders, sanitary engineers, marble masons and landscape gardeners, and provided with those documents, applied to a couple of big bankers with a keen eye for possibilities. They were going to form a syndicate and the works were to be begun at once. That same evening I had a long conversation with the young fellow. ‘So your town will rise like Thebes at the sound of Amphion’s lyre ?’ I asked smilingly, for all this was very new to me. ‘Mythology may be reduced to practice sometime,’ he answered, ‘but I do not suppose we shall be as magical as all that. One thing, however, is very certain. The whole of my plans will be started on the same day, and if possible will be completed within a few weeks of one another. We are not going to follow the example of Europe and build a street or half-a-street of houses at a time.’” Then the Emperor sat still for a moment or two. “You are considerably older than I am,” he said at last to my uncle ; “yet you may outlive me. When in days to come people tell you that Napoleon III. transformed Paris, you in your turn may tell them that he owed the idea to an American of whom Europe has probably never heard ; for on the evening to which I refer, I made up my mind to do what I am doing, if ever I got the chance.”

The Emperor was right ; in spite of the fierce outcry against

his plans everybody took advantage of them to line his own pockets. I am old enough to remember all this ; for though I was not thirteen when I came to Paris, at which period the transformation of the capital was virtually in its first stages, it never ceased during the reign of Napoleon III., and as it went on, fraudulent speculation and corruption of every kind in connection with that transformation became more and more rife. With the exception of the Emperor himself, Fleury, Princesse Mathilde, and perhaps Haussmann, there was not a single person at the Tuileries, whether male or female, and from the highest to the lowest, who did not benefit materially and to a larger or smaller extent by the facilities afforded to them by their positions for surprising, worming out and intercepting early news of Haussmann's projects. Of course, the knowledge thus acquired had to be used cautiously and according to the possessor's means and opportunities. Few persons had the moneys wherewith to buy house property or land in the doomed quarters, and when they had such funds, they had to proceed warily, lest a show of too great anxiety should "let the cat out of the bag."

The construction of the Pont de l'Alma (albeit not under that name) was included from the very beginning in the Emperor's and Haussmann's plans. The entire transformation of the village of Chaillot, which for two hundred years previously had enjoyed the title of *faubourg*, had, however, not been decided upon publicly—although one moment's reflection on the part of those who did think must have shown them that logically, practically, and artistically the one measure would entail the other. The Pont de l'Alma was finished about the beginning of 1856, for I remember that I was taken to see it within a few months of my arrival in Paris. And yet, a couple of week's previously, my elder grand-uncle, coming home one day from the Tuileries, told his brother that the Empress had bought the mansion of Count Lauriston for her mother at a cost of three millions of francs. The fact of such a purchase, involving an outlay which must have appeared enormous to most people, especially in those days when hundreds and thousands of pounds were not mentioned in conversation with the unconcern of to-day, was calculated to impress itself upon the mind of a lad of thirteen and particularly sharp for his age. Nevertheless, he would probably have forgotten all about it, but for the comments to which the purchase

gave rise during the next week, which comments were revived about a twelvemonth or eighteen months later when the pickaxe began to do its work in Chaillot. The most lenient conclusion to those comments as affecting the purchaser herself was a consensus of opinion "that she was very clever; as clever as Louis Philippe who invented European complications—in order to contradict the reports, having meanwhile profited by the fall of public securities and their almost immediate restoration to public confidence."

I am not prepared to say whether the compliment to the Empress was genuine or not, but the transaction was unquestionably a profitable one. It would be difficult to compute the present value of the property off-hand; it is certainly worth four times the amount of its purchase-price forty years ago. The site of the erstwhile mansion of Count Lauriston and its immense gardens, which were but a small part of the estate of the Comte de Choiseul-Gouffier, have all been built on; the old-world village of Chaillot has become the very modern Quartier Marbœuf; the transformation took many years, but the Empress, as far as I am aware, did not part with her land. A mere ground lease for building purposes is a very unusual thing in France, so we may take it that the palatial dwellings which have been erected on the site of the Comtesse de Montijo's former town residence are part and parcel of the property.

"It is a decent provision for a rainy day," said my grand-uncle, in the latter years of the Second Empire, when, in spite of his personal affection for the Emperor, or just because of that affection, he began to doubt the stability of the Empire. "A decent provision for a rainy day," repeated Alexandre Dumas, the Elder, who happened to be seated by his side, and who neither liked the dynasty nor believed in its duration; "say an ark for the coming flood, and you will be nearer the mark." And forthwith there was a positive flood on his part of historical and literary anecdote in connection with the slowly rising Quartier Marbœuf. I feel perfectly certain that not one of those anecdotes has ever been published, and I should like to give them all, but the space at my disposal has been overstepped more than once, and I must not transgress again. At the time of this interesting and impromptu lecture—for it was nothing less, seeing that it lasted for nearly an hour—I was over twenty, and though already then fully

confident of my memory, had begun to take notes. I have these by me now, and they would make two or three chapters. As it is, I must confine myself to an extract.

“It is very curious,” began Dumas, “that as early as 1842 or 1843 Balzac foresaw the eventual transformation of the village of Chaillot into a fashionable quarter. As usual, he conceived a vast scheme for making money in connection with it by buying up the whole of the land. Equally as a matter of course, no one would embark in the enterprise. They treated the project, as they were in the habit of treating all Balzac’s plans, as purely visionary. Visionary they no doubt were, including as they did, the publication of a gigantic edition of Balzac’s works in separate volumes, each volume to have attached to it a ticket in a lottery, the prize in which was to be a plot of ground or a mansion. It would take too long to explain the whole of the complex project, but the presentiment with regard to the destiny of Chaillot was right enough. At any rate, one man to whom that presentiment had been communicated, believed in it and almost immediately acted upon the belief—namely, Emile de Girardin. In less than a twelvemonth afterwards he bought from M. May, the chaplain to the English Embassy, the former mansion of the Count de Choiseul-Gouffier, in the grounds of which there stood at that time a Protestant place of worship.

The scheme conceived by Balzac for buying up a whole neighborhood was even beyond the private resources of so highly-placed a personage as the Empress Eugénie ; to form syndicates or limited companies to that effect, would have probably defeated its own purpose, for it would have let too many people into secrets which, I repeat, had in the majority of cases been unfairly got hold of. So the favored recipients of those secrets or merely clever eavesdroppers, instead of combining, determined to work each on his own account. Most of them were unable to raise sufficient funds wherewith to buy the smallest bit of house property ; they merely sold their knowledge to the leaseholder of the dwelling, and he in his turn hastened to renew his lease. Of course, he was careful to keep his own counsel, lest the landlord, having too many applications for renewals at one time, should become suspicious and raise the rents. Repeated in six or seven different quarters, although with but one tenant in each, the sale of such information frequently yielded the considerable

sum of between 200,000 and 300,000 francs to the vendor. I am not exaggerating in computing the moneys thus obtained at over one million sterling.

Practically this money came out of the coffers of the Paris Municipality, for it need scarcely be said that the lessees in their subsequent claims for compensation did not forget to reckon the sums disbursed in the purchase of their information, and do what they would the Municipality were found in the end powerless to resist those claims. The original intention on their part had been to let the majority of leases "fall in" before commencing operations in this or that quarter. Under such conditions the ground alone would have had to be paid for. The lessees, with their fresh leases locked in their desks, simply sneered at the Municipality's announced intention to exercise patience. They believed the Civic Fathers to be ignorant of the negotiations they (the lessees) had just concluded with their superior landlords. The Municipality were not as ignorant as the lessees thought them, and in spite of the obstacles thrown in their way repeated their intention to wait, although the period of waiting might be prolonged. Thereupon the lessees forced the Municipality's hand. They set up claims to the effect "that the intention to evict them at the expiration of their leases constituted an act of actual eviction entitling them to damages.*" And preposterous though the contention seemed and seems, its validity was finally admitted by the highest tribunal in France.

This decision paved the way for a system of wholesale exaction and jobbery, the like of which it would be difficult to find in the annals of any modern community in Europe. Equally difficult would it be to find parallels to some of the claims for compensation except in the librettos of Mr. Gilbert and kindred writers. To begin with, there was the claim of the owner of the ground and dwelling, or of the ground only through which the new thoroughfares were to run. He was simply extortionate in virtue of his ownership. One case in point must suffice. One of those owners had as good as sold a plot of ground to a firm of hydraulic engineers for 75,000 francs, which sum he professed himself glad to accept. Pending the signing of the documents, he got wind of M. Haussmann's project of cutting a new thor-

* I have condensed the claim into non-legal language, but taken care to preserve the spirit of the plea.

oughfare across what was still his property. He declined to ratify his bargain with the engineers, and eventually claimed 1,800,000 francs. The valuation-jury awarded him 950,000 francs. Then there was the claim of the principal tenant, who, as a rule, occupied the ground floor part of the premises, including the shop. He could not claim compensation for being disturbed in his actual tenancy, inasmuch as the Municipality had announced their intention not to disturb him; nevertheless, he claimed in virtue of the decision of the Court of Cassation, to which I alluded just now; and moreover magnified his claim on the plea of the prospective harm his heirs and successors would suffer. "But," objected the leading counsel for the Municipality, "if my instructions are correct, the claimant's lease which has just been renewed will not expire for another twelve years; the claimant is close upon seventy, his wife is but a few years younger. They will scarcely remain in business until they are eighty; and although they are unquestionably entitled to damages in virtue of the judgment of the Court of Cassation that judgment makes no provision for the hypothetical injury done to heirs or mere business successors. Besides, the former in this instance do not exist at all, seeing that the claimant is childless, and will in all probability remain so at his advanced age." To which the claimant's counsel made rejoinder: "My learned brother should not take it for granted that my client will go childless to his grave, because my client himself is far from cherishing such convictions; he belongs to the Hebrew race, and the miracle that was vouchsafed to Abraham and Sarah may be repeated in his favor, unless my learned brother wishes to imply that the age of miracles is past."

Finally, there was a category of tenants, mostly occupants of sets of apartments who claimed compensation on purely sentimental grounds. To recapitulate their alleged grievances one by one would lead me too far afield; one gentleman pleaded that his invalid daughter could see, from the windows of the apartment from which he was to be dislodged, the steeple of the church where her mother worshipped when a girl. The majority indulged in "tall talk" about "the roofs that had sheltered their fathers and the spot where their children's cradle stood." And though in reality three-fourths of those who talked thus had not even been born in Paris—for barely one-third of the Paris popu-

lation are natives of the capital—the valuation-jury generally admitted their claims; ostensibly in order “to teach the government a lesson;” in reality because each of their decisions created a precedent by which they in their turn hoped to benefit at some future time.

This much about the doings of the valuation jury and claimants while they were both left to their own devices, expectations of immediate or contingent spoil, and so-called political independence. The latter feeling, however, was soon raised to the boiling-point by newspaper articles and pamphlets. Of one of these pamphlets I would say a few words, inasmuch as it was the work of the late Jules Ferry, at that time an obscure, and probably deservedly obscure, barrister, like so many other shining lights of the Third Republic that was to be. It was the most widely circulated; I doubt, however, whether throughout the whole of France there were a hundred people who read it from beginning to end, most people giving up the attempt after half a dozen pages, for it was dull to a degree, and what was worse, dull without being convincing, and, as the Emperor said, “dull under false pretenses.” Its great sale was due to its clever title, a perversion of the title of the French version of Hoffmann’s *Weird Tales*—*Les Contes Fantastiques d’Hoffmann*. M. Ferry had altered this into *Les Comtes Fantastiques d’Hausmann*; but the happy thought was due to two of Dufaure’s secretaries, MM. Duval and Delprat, and M. Ferry’s friends, who had hit upon it during a conversation at an Orleanist’s social gathering, and made a present of the idea to the future Prime Minister, who died as President of the Senate. “After all,” remarked Napoleon III., when he had read the *brochure*, “I am glad that M. Ferry’s pamphlet is so dull; if it had been as brilliant as its title, M. Ferry would be in the painful position of having to bring an action for libel against his face and appearance.” The remark was spiteful, but absolutely just. In those days Ferry was a cantankerous likeness of Offenbach. Later on the likeness grew less apparent, and the cantankerousness more. I used to meet him frequently on the boulevards in company with Hérold, the future Prefect of the Seine under the Third Republic, and the son of the celebrated composer of *Zampa* and *Le Pré aux Clercs*, who had been a friend of my grand-uncle. I liked Hérold, who had one of the most wonderful memories I have

ever met with, but I always avoided him when Ferry was with him. My grand-uncle, seeing them together one day, exclaimed, "Here goes Zampa's heir in custody of a gendarme."

M. Ferry charged Haussmann with having purposely underrated the cost of his proposed improvements. "That is nominally true," said the Emperor, "but in reality Haussmann has not underrated the cost of the improvements, he has only underrated the greed of the Paris *bourgeois*, just as he would have underrated M. Ferry's impudence if he had attempted to transform him into a fair critic and a gentleman." The Emperor was right once more; the greed of the Paris tradesman and *bourgeois* burdened the budget of the capital with sixteen millions sterling in as many years, and this in addition to the reasonable indemnities which might have been claimed in virtue of the judgment of the Court of Cassation. At least 15 per cent. of these moneys stuck to the fingers of more or less unscrupulous lawyers, retained by shady and still more unscrupulous agencies, which for a minimum commission of 10 per cent. on all the sums wrung from the Municipality, set the machinery of the law in motion in behalf of the smallest and utterly unimportant shop-keepers—such as dairymen, fruiterers, greengrocers, coal-sellers, etc.—all of whom, but for those agents' instigation, would have removed to adjacent streets or adjacent premises without losing their customers. The organization of those agencies was little short of perfect; their recruiting of fraudulent auxiliaries strategic to a degree. One of those pseudo *hommes d'affaires*, with the successors of whom Paris swarms even at present, managed to get hold of about ten quires of old paper bearing the government stamp. Each of the sheets served for the making of a lease supposed to have been granted in 1850. He himself never put pen to paper; he simply sold each of the sheets to the various agencies in need of them at the rate of 10,000 francs apiece. The £100,000 sterling thus earned were all lost in Stock Exchange speculations, and after the fall of the Empire he boasted of what he had done. When the Commune exploded, he came to London and set up business as a wine-merchant; he is now leading a miserable and precarious existence in another capital of Europe.

Ante-dated leases, made with the connivance of both signatories to such documents, were, after all, but one wheel in the huge mechanism of fraud. The agencies provided false inventories,

false balance-sheets, false sets of account-books, false stock in the shape of blocks of wood, neatly wrapped up and suitably labelled ; they repainted and redecorated the shops of their clients ; and for many weeks before and after the time appointed for the regulation visit of the valuation jury, the establishment was crowded with customers from morn till night, which sham customers were attended to by equally sham assistants, hired at the rate of three francs per day. In fact, no stage-manager of genius ever arranged his scenic effects with greater forethought than they.

It would be rash to pretend that all the lawyers those agencies employed were their accomplices ; there were some honorable exceptions, and they were dupes. One of the latter was pleading one day in behalf of a grocer in a moderate way of business. Confidently flourishing the day-book of his client—for the agency frequently left the choice of a barrister to the claimant himself—he began to enumerate the customers, and asked for considerable damages. The counsel for the City of Paris interrupted him. “My learned brother need not trouble himself,” he said ; “I know that day-book by heart, it is the grocers’ day-book ; it has done duty already several times.” As a matter of course, the “learned brother” grew very indignant, and proceeded to refute the allegation. “I am sorry to insist,” replied his opponent, “but if you will turn to page 73, you will find my initials.” The bare fact was this. During a previous trial, the amounts inscribed in that day-book, and quoted in support of an exorbitant claim, had struck the counsel for the City of Paris as being too exaggerated. A vague suspicion of the truth had dawned upon him then, and he had asked to look at the day-book itself, and while pretending to add up figures had quickly initialed the page. He felt almost convinced that he would meet with that account book again. But the claimant got his damages.

On the morning after this decision, the Emperor, contrary to his habit, was up betimes, and when Fleury went in to have his usual chat he found him dressed and ready to go out. A few minutes later, Haussmann, who had evidently been sent for, made his appearance. “You and I are going for a walk, *mon cher préfet*,” was Napoleon’s greeting. “I am afraid I only know my Parisian subjects theoretically, and I wish to get a little more practical knowledge of them. I will take another leaf from my uncle’s book ; he used to go for walks in the morning with

Duroc, and he told my mother that one of those strolls was worth a hundred reports from Fouché. That was after he had been plainly given to understand that a ruler must pay through the nose for any and everything he wants for his personal use and gratification, and a still more extravagant price if the object he desires be intended for the benefit of the nation at large. I will tell you how it happened. He and Duroc were walking along one early morn, when in the window of a very small *bric-à-brac* shop my uncle noticed a bronze statuette, the companion of which was in the Louvre. 'What is the price of this bronze?' he asked of the dealer, who was perched aloft on a ladder, dusting the front of his place. 'Don't worry me,' growled the man, without troubling to look down or come down; 'you will find it too high for your pockets.' My uncle, who was in an amiable mood just then, insisted. 'Well, suppose I say four hundred francs, what then?' was the grudging answer. 'Then I should take it,' shouted my uncle; for the dealer had not stirred. This time he looked down and caught sight of my uncle's face. He descended immediately, but gave no further sign of having recognized him. His tone, however, altered. 'I said "suppose," monsieur; I was only joking; in reality it is two thousand francs.' 'Very well,' remarked the Emperor, 'I will take it at that.' 'I am afraid I cannot let you have it,' objected the man. 'A gentleman who saw it a few days ago told me that its companion statuette is in the Louvre, and if the authorities have set their minds on having it, I will not part with it for less than five thousand francs.' 'Do you know who I am?' said my uncle. The man stammered and turned pale. 'I see you do, and I mean to make you stick to your bargain. There is no more reason why you should rob the nation at large than why you should rob a private individual. I mean to have it at the price you asked me.'

"My uncle had the statuette, but I am not of my uncle's metal. I cannot force the Parisians to sell their houses at the price they would take from a private individual; but I must find a way of meeting craft and greed. Contact with the Parisian may suggest one. That is why I wish you to go for a walk."

ALBERT N. VANDAM.

(To be Continued.)